

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Stone Industry Project Team

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### SCOTS

The Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) was formed to address the problems that were arising from the use of natural stone materials in the urban streetscapes. In October 2000 SCOTS published the first edition of the "Good Practice Guide" with its second edition now available on [www.scots-website.org.uk](http://www.scots-website.org.uk). In summary, it is invariably the failure of the method of fixing rather than the actual materials themselves that leads to difficulties.

The SSLG's Chief Executive, speaking at its Conference in Stirling on 31st March, reminded the meeting that Scotland had at one time produced indigenous materials that met ALL its construction needs – building, walling, paving, roadways, kerbs, roofing and so on.

It still could but Scottish quarries now operated in a global market place.

He reminded the meeting of the operational practices of quarries in other countries that supplied the UK with stone materials. In particular he quoted from a *Herald* article by Marian Pallister (20th January 1999) and the following are only a few of the extracts.

*"In neighbouring Rajistan, in quarries reminiscent of a Breughlian image of hell, 1.8 million workers experience the same old story of exploitation. Working in temperatures as high as 48C, they earn a pittance, given no protective clothing or*

### County mineral maps

At the SCOTS seminar Mr McKinney also underlined the serious lack of knowledge relating to locally available materials and the fact that this was restricting the decision process for Local Authority Planning Officers. The result was that inappropriate developments, that prevented access to vitally important indigenous materials, could be permitted.

Since Scotland did NOT undertake the "County Mineral Maps" exercise, the local authorities in Scotland are seriously disadvantaged, as opposed to their English counterparts, when it comes to knowing what minerals are in their area. The consequence is that valuable and essential building stone sources could be built over and lost for the foreseeable future.

Research shows that some dated mineral resource information exists in the form of work undertaken by the Scottish Development Department in the 1980s but try as the SSLG might, it cannot find any reference to the issue of dimensional stone reserves. Fire clay, hard rock materials for aggregate, sand and special sand, gravels, clay and mudstone and limestone all appear to be addressed but slate and dimensional stone, the very building blocks on which Scotland's built heritage is so heavily dependent, have been neglected.

*earn a pittance, given no protective clothing or equipment, and for the injured, the idea of compensation is a sick joke". "Men wield pickaxes over bare feet, wear no eye protection, no safety harnesses when they are lowered into sheer-faced quarries".*

It is against this background that Scottish quarries, applying all the appropriate health and safety standards, are required to compete and perhaps it is worth a moment to reflect on the way in which our money is being spent and whether we are prepared, on the grounds of costs alone, to simply turn a blind eye to such human exploitation.

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## Celebrate traditional craft skills

Further to the "Centre of Excellence" article, at Fyvie Castle (see Newsletter No 9), a major Conference is being organised by the Robert Gordon University on the 13th and 14th June '05, and will be held at Haddo House, Aberdeenshire.

As indicated in that Newsletter, the SSLG has long supported the vision behind this project and contributed both in time and effort to the development of the Business Case for the Scottish Traditional Skills Training Centre at Fyvie.

### Day 1

The speakers include:

- **Mr Marc Ellington**, addressing *The Decline in Traditional Skills*
- **Dr Charles Hailey**, *An American Perspective*
- **Tarmo-Andre Elvisto**, *Sustainable Renovation – A Modern Challenge*
- **Mrs Loh Lim Lin-Lee**, *Conserving Traditional Trades and Endangered Skills*
- **Dr Matthew Hardy**, *Romania – Challenges and Opportunities*
- **James Simpson**, *Individuality and Creativity in Conservation*
- **Dr Peter Burman**, bringing the first day to a conclusion.

### Day 2

Will consist of a series of workshops in parallel session and the day will be chaired by Dr Bill Brogden, Reader in Architecture at the Scott Sutherland Schools of the RGU.

The themes for the workshops, alphabetically listed, are as follows:

- Brickwork, Concrete, Conservation Planning, Ironmongery, Lime, Masonry, Paint, Slate, Timber, Training & Policy.

**For more details** contact Barbara Jones, Events/PR Co-ordinator RGU (Tel: 01224 262030). The cost of the 2 day event is £180 if booked before 25th April and £200 thereafter and details of accommodation are also included in the promotional material.

The SSLG's Chief executive attends the meetings of the National Heritage Training Group, normally held in London, and reports that progress is being made on several fronts.

### **Master Craftsperson**

There is a strong desire to replicate the skills of yesteryear and the use of such a phrase, in the modern idiom, is understandable as it has a value that is understood and appreciated by everyone, but what does such a title mean to the potential customers? Are they prepared to pay a higher price for any work, safe in the knowledge that it will be done to the appropriate standard?

If the answer to the above question is NO then the question we all have to face is "*Why should an employer pay to train someone to such a standard if the client is not going to recognise that the employer MUST recover these investment costs?*" Regrettably, although everyone accepts that it is necessary to pay for quality, invariably there are companies out there that will claim to do the same for less – which of us can resist that temptation?

That is the dilemma currently faced by all employers offering training opportunities. There are some competitors who do not invest in craft training and are therefore able to offer cheaper work.

This is a problem, similar to that regarding the importation of stone from abroad, that we all have to address or accept the consequences of the loss of training opportunities and a growing "skills crisis" and, in addition, our built heritage being repaired with inappropriate materials.

The SSLG, recognising the developments in the stone masonry training in Elgin and the increased interest by local employers, is seeking to explore other training options in the more rural areas.

As has been reported earlier, the general drop out rate for trainees attending a local college tends to be about 20% but, when they are required to stay away from home when attending college, the general drop out rate increases to between 40% & 60%.

While there are no clear figures available, it is assumed that these trainees remain, to a large extent, with their employers but never achieve any recognised qualification. Apart from being a waste of time and money, the above assumption results in a significant number of partially trained operatives who may or may not have attained the appropriate standards.

At a time when qualifications are becoming more and more important, it is essential that appropriate training facilities are provided throughout Scotland to minimise the number of partially trained operatives.

The SSLG is actively pursuing this matter at the moment with HIE and the CITB-ConstructionSkills in Inverness.

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